Movie Review: 'Rush Hour 3'

by David_Elliott

"Rush Hour 3" is a traffic jam of cliches that doesn't achieve gridlock mainly because the stars, Jackie Chan and Chris Tucker, are too tireless to quit.

'RUSH HOUR 3' - Youki Kudoh and Jackie Chan star in the action comedy 'Rush Hour 3.' CNS Photo courtesy of Glen Wilson. RATINGS

4 STARS - Excellent.

3 STARS - Worthy.

2 STARS - Mixed.

1 STAR - Poor.

0 - Forget It (a dog.) They do slow down. Chan, at 53 showing touches of wax in the face, is again game to go as Inspector Lee. He tends to do passive reactions and rests a lot. He can still move with zip, yet if you think he's doing all his stunts, you also must believe that Charles Bronson was in ace shape for those late "Death Wish" pictures.

Tucker, a spring rooster of 34, returns as Lee's silly and babe-chasing pal, Carter, an LAPD detective who also directs traffic. He pitches joke woo in a falsetto voice, as if a Chihuahua were nipping his vocal chords. In

a song gag, he hits tones worthy of Michael Jackson being suddenly inducted into the Marines.

The guys fondly trade black and Asian racial digs while pursuing a vast Chinese crime cartel. One so secretive that its leaders' names are demurely written on the shaved head of a tall showgirl (Noemie Lenoir, a giraffe va-voom).

There also is petite Roman Polanski as a cruel Paris police chief, evoking for some of us a smiling memory: Jack Nicholson's greeter line in "Chinatown" ("Hey Claude, where'd you find the midget?"). And there is Yvan Attal as a French cabbie who comes to relish imported American violence, yet pops a boldly political (for a mainstream film) put-down: "You lost in Vietnam. You lost in Iraq."

Other rewards? Many showgirls. And Max von Sydow, favorite star of the late Ingmar Bergman, looking nearly posthumous as an oily diplomat. And there is a showy showdown on the Eiffel Tower, with extravagantly colorful but disrespectful use of the French flag (payback for the Iraq/Nam crack?).

There also is a vision that not even Toulouse-Lautrec could have imagined: Chan singing on a red velvet swing in a sexy Parisian nightclub. Sort of a delayed bonus for countless kicks in the face.

Still, this action comedy cost $140 million. And not for the wit of the writers, who stoop to imitating the old "Who's on first?" routine. In a newspaper interview, director Brett Ratner groused about being denied $2 million (pocket change!) to suitably crown a chase scene. Sort of like Orson Welles weeping over "The Magnificent Ambersons."

If Von Sydow is missing Bergman, he can stifle grief by considering that Ratner is ready to continue the high line of auteur filming. Max need only ponder the heartfelt testimonial of New Line production head Toby Emmerich:

"Even though you can argue that Brett is easily distracted, and has a short attention span and likes to go out and party and have a good time, Brett is, in his own way, a perfectionist."

Why argue with perfection?

A New Line Cinema release. Director: Brett Ratner. Writers: Jeff Nathanson, Ross LaManna. Cast: Jackie Chan, Chris Tucker, Noemie Lenoir, Max von Sydow, Yvan Attal, Tzi Ma. Running time: 1 hour, 38 minutes. Rated PG-13. 2 stars.

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